



Temporary Park Closures

Frequently Asked Questions

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission announced on Aug. 30 the temporary closure of all services and vehicle access to 24 state recreation areas and five state historical parks.

Which park areas are temporarily closed?

The following state recreation areas will be closed Sept. 16 and reopen May 1, 2014:

Blue River, Seward County
Cheyenne, Hall County
Conestoga, Lancaster County
Cottonwood, Cherry County – [UPDATE: Will remain open](#)
Dead Timber, Dodge County
DLD, Adams County
Keller Park, Brown County – [UPDATE: Park is open](#)
Long Lake, Brown County
Long Pine, Brown County – [UPDATE: Will remain open](#)
North Loup, Howard County
Olive Creek, Lancaster County
Oliver Reservoir, Kimball County – [UPDATE: Will remain open](#)
Pelican Point, Burt County * – [UPDATE: Will remain open](#)
Riverview Marina, Otoe County *
Rock Creek Lake, Dundy County – [UPDATE: Will remain open](#)
Sandy Channel, Phelps County – [UPDATE: Will remain open](#)
Schramm Park, Sarpy County
Sutherland Reservoir, Lincoln County *
Union Pacific, Buffalo County
Verdon, Richardson County
Stagecoach, Lancaster County
Walgren Lake, Sheridan County – [UPDATE: Reopened Oct. 17](#)
War Axe, Buffalo County

The following state recreation area will be closed Oct. 7 and reopen May 1, 2014:

Alexandria, Jefferson County
[UPDATE: Alexandria will remain open through Oct. 20 to accommodate a Halloween event scheduled for Oct. 18-19.](#)



* Vehicle access to boat ramps will remain open at Riverview, Pelican Point and Sutherland's Hershey Beach.

The following state historical parks will close Sept. 16 and reopen May 1, 2014:

Ash Hollow, Garden County

Buffalo Bill Ranch, Lincoln County

Fort Hartsuff, Valley County

The following state historical park will close Sept. 23 and reopen April 23, 2014:

Arbor Lodge, Otoe County

[UPDATE: Arbor Lodge will be open for living history events Sept. 29, Oct. 6, Oct. 13 and Oct. 20 and for the Enchanted Arboretum Art Auction on Sept. 28 and Enchanted Forest on Oct. 20.](#)

The following state historical park will close Oct. 7 and reopen May 1, 2014:

Fort Atkinson, Washington County

[UPDATE: Fort Atkinson will be open Nov. 2 for the themed Candlelight Tour "Death of Lt. Gabriel Field."](#)

Why did Game and Parks temporarily close some parks?

We temporarily closed some parks so that we can devote the staff at those parks and financial resources required to maintain during the closure to address a \$30 million backlog of deferred maintenance.

What is deferred maintenance?

All park facilities (roads, buildings, campgrounds, toilets, boat ramps, etc.) and systems (electrical grid, plumbing, sewers, water systems, etc.) have a life cycle that eventually requires major repairs or replacement beyond routine maintenance. These are items that require financial and labor commitments that exceed routine maintenance. These are referred to as deferred maintenance.

How big is the deferred maintenance problem?

Deferred maintenance needs exceed \$30 million. In addition, an estimated \$13 million is needed to bring the state park system into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Nebraska's parks are undergoing an evaluation through our engineering and operations divisions.



What is the state park system responsible for maintaining?

With 79 public areas, including eight state parks, 10 state historical parks, 59 state recreation areas and two state recreational trails, the state park system is responsible for the maintenance of:

- 72,166 acres of land
- 67,445 acres of water
- 1,041 miles of trails
- more than 800 miles of internal roads, including more than 100 miles of paved roads
- 840 on-site waste systems and/or connections to wastewater treatment systems
- 1,600 buildings
- 3,000 camping pads with electrical hookup
- 7,400 other campsites
- 95 playgrounds
- 30 trailer dump stations
- 120 pressurized wells
- 8 water towers
- 4 water treatment plants
- 6 swimming pools
- 280 bridges

Why has Game and Parks not kept up with these maintenance needs?

Game and Parks addresses a large volume of maintenance needs as they occur. With rising costs of maintenance and equipment, the demand outpaces our ability to keep up. In addition, funding and staffing levels have not kept pace with the needs. The state park system is supported by 78 percent user fees and most of the rest by is supplied by General Fund tax dollars. Nebraska's park permit fee — compared to other states that have a park permit fee— is one of the lowest in the nation. The cost of a park permit can only be increased by the Nebraska Legislature and all attempts, even when successful, have been difficult. This revenue source was designed to fund the day-to-day operations and maintenance activities, such as mowing, painting, cleaning the restrooms and other routine tasks. It was never designed to fund larger repairs and replacement of infrastructure.

Today's park system is aging and is also much larger than it was in 1978 when the park permit was enacted. General Fund tax dollars have decreased as a proportion of total budget over time. In 1978, 80 percent of the Parks Division's budget came from General Fund tax dollars. In 2012, 29 percent of the Parks Division's budget came from General Fund tax dollars.



Can Game and Parks obtain grants or raise hunting and fishing fees to help cover costs?

Park funding (78 percent) is derived primarily through a user pay system (park permits, camping fees, and cabin fees). These fees make up what is called the Park Cash Fund. About 22 percent of funding comes from the state's general fund. Hunting and fishing permit fees make up the Game Cash Fund, which covers operation of wildlife management areas and public and private habitat work, etc. Park cash and Game cash are entirely separate and by state law, each fund must be devoted to its own purpose. Game cash can't be used for state parks operations. Parks have used grants and donations for capital developments and deferred maintenance. Grants available for parks are less than 1/15th of the total budget. Below is an approximate breakdown of state park system fund revenues:

- Total fund revenues for the state park system in 2012 were approximately \$28 million.
 - Park Cash Fund, \$18.7 million
 - General Fund, \$6.3 million
 - NORDA (cigarette tax), \$1.4 million
 - Federal Trail monies, \$917,900
 - Other Grants, \$725,300
 - Cowboy Trail Cash Fund, \$27,000

How have you tried to address this problem?

Game and Parks has recognized these needs for some time and has previously taken several steps, such as requesting more money from the state's building maintenance funds, and suggesting enhanced funding to legislators (for example, LB 362 introduced by Sen. Avery, which proposed to replace the park entry permit with a \$7 charge on motor vehicles to increase revenues). In the absence of increased revenues, during the past five years Game and Parks has transferred eight park areas out of the state system, privatized and consolidated several park operations, and eliminated 43 permanent park positions (nearly 20 percent of the Parks Division workforce).

How will temporarily closing these parks help?

Some of the deferred maintenance items, such as putting new roofs on smaller buildings and building handicapped accessible toilets and other facilities, cost as much or more in labor as materials. The primary advantage of these temporary park closures is devoting personnel stationed at the closed parks to performing the highest priority of these types of projects. Also, the dollars saved from reduced costs for trash contracts, fuel, road maintenance, etc., will be transferred to buying materials for these priority projects.

Why not wait until winter to close the parks?



Park visitation on most areas begins to decline following Labor Day. The cost of services such as road, toilet and facility maintenance, and contracted trash pickup, does not decline at the same rate. By picking a date for the temporary closures that is following Labor Day, fewer users are impacted. Beginning before winter still allows some cost savings through reduction of services. Even in a case where income and costs may be even, park personnel could not be devoted to the priority deferred maintenance projects if their attention was required for the other normal activities. In certain instances the Sept. 16 closing date was delayed to accommodate previous commitments for special events, such as the Applejack Festival at Arbor Lodge.

What can the public do to help?

- [Volunteer](#) to do work on state park areas. For example, contact Game and Parks about serving as a campground host. Campground hosts receive free camping in exchange for campground monitoring and light duty.
- Join Friends of the Park group. Many state park areas, especially state historical parks, have organizations devoted to assisting with park development, activities or care. Game and Parks appreciates these groups and their efforts to raise money and devote their time to park improvement and enhancement. There is strength in numbers and fresh ideas and increased volunteerism would undoubtedly be beneficial.
- Let your voice be heard. Share your ideas for funding the state's parks system with Nebraska Game and Parks and with other decision makers. Support the funding mechanisms and amounts necessary to sustain one of the nation's greatest state park systems, recognizing the importance of our park system to the citizens of Nebraska, for example:
 - In 2012, 18 of the top 25 tourist attractions in Nebraska were state parks and recreation areas.
 - In 2012, over 11.1 million visits occurred at Nebraska state parks.
 - More than 75 percent of Nebraskans have visited one of our state park or recreation areas in the last five years.
 - The economic impact of Nebraska's state parks exceeds \$750 million annually, supporting over 8,000 private sector jobs (persons providing goods and services to park goers) and causing \$448 million in retail sales.
 - 92.7 percent of our park users find a high level of satisfaction overall with our state park facilities.
 - 85.7 percent of Nebraskans feel outdoor recreation is important to their quality of life.
 - 69 percent of Nebraskans expect to have outdoor recreation facilities and activities available to them.



- Our state parks have been recognized as some of the best in the nation by leading travel magazines and organizations.

How can a park user donate or help support the park system?

A park user can donate by writing a check out to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, indicating in the memo field that it is a donation to help the parks. Those donations will be put directly into the Park Cash fund for use by the park system. If you would like to donate to a specific park area improvement or activity, please contact parks administration.

Can I get a refund on my park permit since you are closing about one-third of the parks?

No. The park entry permit is for entry to parks statewide, and there are many other park options available. Parks with temporary closures are still available by foot for outdoor recreation, day-use only.

Will camping be allowed at temporarily closed areas?

No.

What does the temporary closure mean?

The parks that are temporarily closed mean that they are closed to all activity other than walk-in day use. Walk-in day use includes activities such as: picnicking, fishing from the shoreline, photography, wildlife viewing, hunting on foot, and trail use from sun up to sun down. The restrooms will be shut down, the trash will not be picked up, and the water and electricity will be shut off until May 1, 2014. If problems arise with day use, we may be forced to further limit activities or fully close areas.

Are the deferred maintenance projects taking place at the parks that are being temporarily closed?

No. We are diverting staff from the closed areas to work on bigger deferred maintenance projects in other areas. Some of these projects could affect the temporarily closed areas, but the work will not be done at those areas.

Will hunting and fishing be allowed at temporarily closed areas?



A visitor may hunt and fish on foot at the closed areas, where those activities are allowed by regulations. Restrooms will be closed and there will not be trash pickup, so visitors will need to pack out what they pack in to the area. Hunting is not allowed within 100 yards of any improved areas by park regulations (facilities, buildings, campgrounds).

Will I still have access to the boat ramps and docks?

No, with three exceptions. Vehicle access will be closed to all boat ramps until May 1, 2014, unless otherwise posted. Vehicle access to boat ramps will remain open at Riverview Marina, Pelican Point and Sutherland's Hershey Beach.

Where can visitors park to enter into the park for day use?

The park areas will be gated and/or posted a short distance from the entrance. Visitors will be able to park on the outside edges of the park area, but they will not be allowed to drive on the interior roads. Areas will be gated with a cable gate, and an additional cable may be placed around the wings of the gate so visitors cannot drive around the closure. Visitors parking on a county road outside the park area do so at their own risk.

Will a park entry permit still be required to enter the park?

Yes, a valid park entry permit is required.

What if a community or volunteers want to have a closed area open for special events or activities?

Game and Parks is willing to work with interested parties who wish to have an area open for special events or activities. Those activities must not require on-site parks staff attention or activity that will divert staff from the intended goal of focusing their time toward addressing deferred maintenance.

Why are the roads to the areas closed?

Access is closed to anything that requires Game and Parks' attention, such as road maintenance, snow removal and trash pick-up. Attention to those areas takes away from Game and Parks' ability to work on deferred maintenance projects.

What other outdoor recreation options are available near the temporarily closed parks?



Check out the 2013 Public Access Atlas to find locations of state and federal wildlife, fishing and outdoor recreation areas. The atlas may be viewed at <http://www.outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/programs/CRP/atlas.asp> and it is available in hard copy wherever hunting and fishing permits are sold.

Who can I contact for more information?

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